

CHAPTER I. PREPARING CORRESPONDENCE

1-1 Purpose.

This chapter contains information on departmental policy and standards for how letters and memorandums -- including general, secretarial, White House, and congressional correspondence -- are prepared.

- A. For details on preparing letters, see Chapter II.
- B. For details on preparing memorandums, see Chapter III.
- C. For details on preparing secretarial correspondence (other than congressional correspondence), see Chapter IV.
- D. For details on preparing White House correspondence, see Chapter V.
- E. For details on preparing congressional correspondence, see Chapter VI.

1-2 Use.

Use of this handbook is mandatory departmentwide. All prior versions are obsolete.

- A. This handbook presents departmental policies and procedures for preparing correspondence. Correspondence may not be prepared contrary to the procedures set forth herein.

The originator and concurring/reviewing officials of correspondence may not impose their personal style preferences over the handbook standards nor return correspondence for retyping to reflect personal preferences.

1-3 Policies for Originators.

- A. Answer informally as much incoming correspondence as possible. Use the telephone or email to save time and reduce the document preparation workload. Keep telephone calls and emails short, courteous, and to the point.

Note: Do not use the telephone or email to answer incoming correspondence that: (a) would affect proposed or existing HUD policies, (b) must be reviewed by, or coordinated with, other offices, or (c) when office protocol requires the preparation of a more formal response.

- B. Form Letter. Develop and use form letters to respond to requests for publications, blank forms, or other printed material when the same information is frequently requested. (See Exhibit 1-1 for sample form letter.)

- C. If the information requested is available on the Internet, refer the customer to the website. Send only hud.gov website links or other public website addresses. When referring to a website address in the body of a letter or email response, underline the website address. Do not set the address out in any other way; for example, in boldface or in parentheses.

D. Types of Responses to Controlled Correspondence.

1. Acknowledgment Letter: Lets the sender know that their letter was received and will be answered soon. Prepare an acknowledgment when no information can be obtained by the deadline.
2. Interim Letter: A partial response prepared when some, but not all, of the information is available by the deadline.
3. Final Letter: A full response, or the final response following an interim letter.

E. Multiple Addressees.

Prepare letters using one of the following:

1. An original for each addressee;
2. In response to incoming correspondence with multiple signatures, a single reply addressed to the first person who signed the letter. In the first paragraph, state that the reply is also intended for the other addressees; or
3. In response to petitions or resolutions, a single reply addressed to the person who submitted the petition or resolution, or to the first person who signed it. In the body of the letter, mention the other addressees as a group.

F. Congressional Correspondence.

1. Congressional Constituent Correspondence. When a constituent writes to HUD as well as to a Member of Congress on the same subject, and the Member refers their letter to HUD:
 - a. Ensure that the responses to the constituent and to the Member of Congress convey the same information;
 - b. Reference the constituent's letter to HUD in the response to the Member of Congress; and
 - c. Do not reference the correspondence that was forwarded by the Member of Congress in the response to the constituent.

2. Congressional Correspondence With Multiple Addressees.

- a. When initiating a letter to more than one Member of Congress, prepare an original for each addressee.
- b. When responding to an incoming letter signed by more than one Member of Congress, prepare an original of the response, addressed individually, to each Member.

G. Opening Text of Letters. Opening sentences influence the tone of correspondence, which should display a courteous attitude and attempt to establish rapport with the recipient of the correspondence.

Good examples of frequently used opening text are provided below.

1. “Thank you for your letter of [date], [concerning...]; [expressing...]; [supporting...]; [on behalf of...].” The date of the incoming letter should be included in the opening sentence to establish clear timelines.
2. For undated correspondence, use “Thank you for your letter, which was received on [date], [concerning...]; [expressing...]; [supporting...]; [on behalf of...].”
3. “This is in further response to your letter of [date], [concerning...]; [expressing...]; [supporting...]; [on behalf of...].”
4. For correspondence addressed to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary and referred for direct reply, use: “On behalf of [Secretary] [Deputy Secretary] [last name], thank you for your letter of [date], [concerning...]; [expressing...]; [supporting...]; [on behalf of...].”
5. For White House correspondence, see Chapter V for opening text examples.
6. For correspondence addressed to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary and controlled for the signature of the Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations, use: “On behalf of [Secretary] [Deputy Secretary] [last name], thank you for your letter of [date], [concerning...]; [expressing...]; [supporting...]; [on behalf of...].”
7. When a member of Congress requests that HUD reply directly to the constituent use: “[Senator] [Representative] [full name] has asked the Department of Housing and Urban Development to reply to your letter of [date], [concerning...]; [expressing...]; [supporting...]; [on behalf of...].”

H. Plural Pronouns. Use “the Department” or “HUD” instead of “we,” “our,” or “us.” (e.g., “The Department has intensified its focus on monitoring and program

compliance.” instead of “We have intensified our focus on monitoring and program compliance.”)

- I. Abbreviations/Acronyms. Abbreviations and acronyms are good shorthand devices; however, avoid overusing them. An abbreviation or acronym must be spelled out the first time it is used (e.g., Office of Management and Budget (OMB)).

Exception: Never put the acronym HUD in parentheses after referring to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The use of HUD, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, or the Department is appropriate throughout the letter.

- J. Correspondence More Than 60 Days Old. If the correspondence is more than 60 days old, do not refer to it as a “recent letter.” Instead, use “letter.”

- K. Gender-Biased Language. Avoid using gender-biased language. Use the gender-neutral references “one,” “person,” “individual,” or the plural “their” in place of gender specific nouns and pronouns when making a general reference.

- L. Enclosures. In the text of letters, identify any accompanying material as an enclosure. Multiple enclosures should be tabbed for easy reference. An enclosure too bulky to accompany the letter may be sent as a separate package. State in the text that it is being sent under separate cover.

- M. Attachments. In the text of memorandums, identify any accompanying material as an attachment. Multiple attachments should be tabbed for easy reference.

- N. Closing Text of Letters. Closing sentences are influential in establishing good rapport. Good examples of frequently used closing text are provided below.

1. “Thank you for your interest in the Department’s programs.”
2. “I hope the information provided is helpful.”
3. “I appreciate your interest in (name of program).”
4. “I hope this information is helpful in responding to your constituent.” (for congressional correspondence)
5. When appropriate, in the last paragraph, include the name, area code, telephone number, and extension, as well as the email address, of someone who can answer questions about the content. **Note:** Do not identify program staff as the point of contact in congressional letters signed by Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations officials.

- O. Content. Outgoing correspondence must:

1. Ensure that the concerns expressed in the incoming correspondence are thoroughly addressed and that questions are adequately answered;
2. Be concise and to the point;
3. Be written in plain English, not technical jargon;
4. Accurately state the Department's policies;
5. Give a good impression of HUD;
6. Present negative information in a tactful way; and
7. Be error free.

1-4 Control of Correspondence.

The Department uses an official correspondence tracking system (CTS) to control all correspondence. HUD staff in each program and field office must use CTS to document the status of controlled correspondence in their office.

- A. Correspondence Unit Chiefs/Points of Contact. Each HUD Headquarters program office, and regional and field office, must have a designated correspondence unit chief or a point of contact for correspondence matters.
- B. CTS Control. The CTS control is an official record that:
 1. Establishes the information and/or action needed to appropriately manage incoming correspondence; and
 2. Documents correspondence and actions initiated within departmental offices.
- C. Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act. Special requirements apply for responding to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and Privacy Act requests. All FOIA requests received in Headquarters must be forwarded immediately to the FOIA division in the Executive Secretariat for appropriate handling. FOIA requests received in a regional or field office must be forwarded immediately to the regional or field office FOIA Liaison for appropriate handling.

All Privacy Act requests received by the Department, including requests seeking information contained in personnel records, must be forwarded immediately to the Department's Privacy Act Officer for appropriate handling. All Privacy Act requests received in a regional or field office must be forwarded immediately to the regional or field office Privacy Act Officer for appropriate handling.

- 1-5 Questions. If this handbook does not answer your questions, contact your program office's correspondence unit or point of contact for correspondence. The correspondence unit or point of contact for correspondence will contact the Executive Secretariat if they cannot answer your questions.

CHAPTER I Exhibit: Preparing Correspondence

Exhibit 1-1 Sample of a Form Letter



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, DC 20410-3000

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR HOUSING-FEDERAL HOUSING COMMISSIONER

[Date]

[Insert Inside Address]

Dear Sir or Madam:

Thank you for your inquiry requesting information on HUD's programs. The following information is enclosed:

- ___ Guide to Single Family Home Mortgage Insurance
- ___ Rehab a Home with HUD's Section 203(k)
- ___ 100 Q&As About Buying a New Home
- ___ Home Equity Conversion Mortgage (HECM) - Reverse Mortgage
- X Title I Property Improvement Loans
- ___ Title I Manufactured Housing Fact Sheet
- ___ _____

A HUD-approved housing counseling agency may be able to assist you in evaluating the local housing market and determining which alternatives would best suit your needs. The counseling services are usually provided without cost to the client. You may call 1-800-XXX-XXXX or TTY 1-800-XXX-XXXX, both toll-free numbers, or send a message to an email address for assistance.

I hope this information will be helpful to you.

Sincerely,

[Insert Name], Director,
Housing Communication and Marketing Division

This letter is typed in Times New Roman, 11-pitch type for this handbook exhibit only.